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VETERANS AFFAIRS, AND RELATED AGENCIES

SUBCOMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION,
HOUSING AND URBAN DEVELOPMENT, AND
RELATED AGENCIES

Congress of the United States
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June 03, 2021

The Honorable Xavier Becerra
Secretary
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Avenue, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20201

Dear Secretary Becerra,

On May 9, 2021, five migrant girls were found abandoned on a ranch in my congressional district. These young children, ranging from 11-months to age 7, were deserted by human smugglers after being separated by their parents in Mexico following a treacherous journey from Central America to the United States. Left alone and defenseless on a property in Quemado, Texas, the girls were rescued by landowners, who then transferred them into the care of Del Rio Border Patrol agents.

There is no denying that the overflow of illegal immigration at our nation's southern border has caused a humanitarian crisis that must be addressed immediately. In fact, Customs and Border Protection reported 17,171 unaccompanied children were apprehended at the southern border in April alone. The April figure follows a staggering 18,890 children apprehended in March- the highest on record to date.

Those five girls, like so many other unaccompanied minors, have already endured incredible challenges on their trek to our southern border. It is thus incumbent on the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) to openly communicate with Members of Congress as it seeks to fulfill its mission of providing safe harbor and sponsorship of unaccompanied children.

To ensure the utmost transparency between the Executive Branch and Congress, I urge the administration to actively pursue more open channels of communication with Congress to allow us to do away with partisan gridlock and find tangible solutions for the urgent crisis at our nation's southern border. Additionally, I respectfully request a prompt response to the following questions:

- What oversight efforts are being conducted by the administration to ensure that unaccompanied children are placed with safe and legitimate sponsors?

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- What follow-up mechanisms are being enforced, if any, to ensure that HHS continues to monitor children after they have been placed in the custody of a sponsor?
- What initiatives has the administration taken to promote transparency into ORR's operations with both parties in Congress?

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Tony Gonzales".

Tony Gonzales
Member of Congress